

Finding of No Significant Impact

for

The Walker Creek Terrestrial Restoration Project

Environmental Assessment: DOI-BLM-OR-S060-2011-0012-EA

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United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management, Oregon State Office
Salem District, Tillamook Resource Area
Tillamook and Yamhill Counties, Oregon

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Introduction

The Tillamook Resource Area, Salem District Bureau of Land Management (BLM), proposes to implement forest management and restoration activities, which includes commercial timber sales, within the Headwaters Nestucca River 6th-field watershed of the Nestucca River watershed. The proposed action includes commercial density management thinning applied in a variable-spaced manner to approximately 575 acres of predominantly Douglas-fir stands, development of coarse wood structures such as large snags, large down wood and live trees treated to create complex crowns, and planting of shade tolerant native tree species in the understory. The action also includes maintenance and improvement of roads and culverts, treatment of approximately 45 acres to control the spread of *Phellinus weiri*, a root disease, as well as treatment of a portion of the fuels created by the harvest operations. The objective of the variable spaced thinning and associated actions would be to create forest diversity on the landscape by creating conditions, and introducing features, that would directly benefit spotted owls consistent with Late-successional Reserve, Spotted Owl Recovery Plan and Spotted Owl Critical Habitat objectives.

The area where the Walker Creek Terrestrial Restoration Project would occur is approximately 15 miles northwest of the town of McMinnville, Oregon. The project area includes BLM-managed lands within sections 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, and 26 of Township 3 South, Range 6 West, Willamette Meridian (WM), in Tillamook and Yamhill Counties, Oregon.

The EA and unsigned FONSI were made available for public review from **March 12, 2014** through **April 11, 2014**. The notice for public comment was published in legal notices by the Headlight Herald newspaper of Tillamook, Oregon and the News-Register of McMinnville, Oregon. Two comment letters (emailed) were received by the Tillamook Resource Area Field Manager and will be considered in making any final decisions for this project.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based upon review of the Walker Creek Terrestrial Restoration Projects EA, the supporting project record, and comments received by interested publics, I have determined that this project is not a major federal action and would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as defined in 40 CFR 1508.27. There are no site specific impacts that would require supplemental/additional information to the analysis done in the *Salem District Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement*, September 1994 (RMP/FEIS). Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed. This finding is based on the following discussion:

Context. The proposed project is a site-specific action directly involving a total of approximately 725 acres of BLM administered land (575 acres of density management and associated actions and 150 acres of coarse wood development treatments), along with actions occurring on various haul roads. These actions would affect about 6% of the 12,587 acre Headwaters Nestucca 6th filed subwatershed and by themselves do not have international, national, region-wide, or state-wide importance.

The discussion of the significance criteria that follows applies to the intended actions and is within the context of local importance. The EA details the effects of the action alternatives; none of the effects identified, including direct, indirect and cumulative effects, are considered to be significant and do not exceed those effects described in the RMP/FEIS.

Intensity. The following discussion is organized around the Ten Significance Criteria described in 40 CFR 1508.27. The discussions below apply to all proposed actions contained within the Walker Creek Terrestrial Restoration Projects Environmental Assessment.

1. Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse: The effects of the terrestrial restoration project are unlikely to have significant (beneficial and/or adverse) impacts (*EA Section 3*) for the following reasons:

Vegetation and Forest Stand Characteristics (EA section 3.3): Effects to these resources would not have significant impacts because:

- Most forest stand characteristics will be little affected. Canopy closure will remain moderately high, understory vegetation structure and variety will recover quickly after harvest, and all existing coarse wood will be retained. Nearly all large snags will remain standing and smaller snags that are felled or knocked over will be retained as down wood
- There will be an expected long term benefit as the underplanted trees develop into a second canopy layer.
- Residual tree growth will accelerate and very large trees will develop sooner than with no treatment.
- Additional created large coarse wood structures will contribute to greater stand complexity.
- Crown development of residual trees will be increased and include greater complexity.

Hydrology (EA section 3.2): Effects to these resources would not have significant impacts because the project effects on water quality would comply with Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) water quality standards and the Total Daily Maximum Load (TMDL) standard for the Nestucca River watershed because:

- There will be a very small expected decrease in the potential for recruitment of instream large wood from areas where 5-8% of instream wood recruits from, which is not expected to result in a measurable decrease in actual wood recruited to the stream, thus the project will maintain the current hydrological function of the project area streams.
- The project will directly input 30 large trees into small headwater streams that have potential to contribute large wood to larger streams.
- The project will accelerate the growth of trees in the outer portion of riparian reserves which will result in the potential for higher quality instream large wood sooner if and when natural processes recruit wood to the streams.
- Stream temperature will be maintained within the project area by retaining the current vegetation and shading in the primary shade zone (no-harvest buffers) and nearly all of the current levels of shading provided by the secondary shade zone, and thus will continue to contribute to meeting the TMDL for the Nestucca River downstream. Establishment of a second canopy layer will also contribute to increased shading in the primary and secondary shade zones as trees begin to reach mid-canopy level.
- Water quality would be maintained because logging, road construction/renovation, culvert replacement, road maintenance and timber haul project design features (EA section 2.1.3.2) and no-harvest buffers are expected to prevent or minimize sediment from reaching streams and causing sediment/turbidity that would exceed ODEQ water quality standards.
- The project will not have any detectable effect on stream discharges or peak flows due to the limited scale and intensity of the project relative to the size of the subwatershed.

Threatened or Endangered Fish Species or Habitat, Magnuson Stevens Act Essential Fish Habitat and Species with Bureau Status (EA section 3.3): Effects to these resources would not have significant impacts because:

- There is not expected to be a measurable reduction in wood recruitment from the project therefore the project is not expected to affect instream features that are part of listed fish or Bureau status fish habitat (Oregon Coast coho, steelhead).
- The felling of 30 large conifers in headwater streams will have a direct benefit to hydrologic function and thus indirectly benefit listed and Bureau status fish.
- The establishment of shade tolerant conifers and subsequent development of multiple canopy layers will indirectly benefit listed and Bureau status fish by providing a more naturally functioning forest ecosystem that will contribute to better hydrologic function.
- Stream temperatures in the project area are expected to be maintained and will not contribute to adverse effects to listed fish or contribute to the need to list Bureau status fish.
- Small immeasurable, short duration, increases to sedimentation in project area streams are not expected to have consequences to listed or Bureau status fish.
- No detectable changes to stream discharge or peak flows will occur therefore there would not be any expected effect to listed or Bureau status fish.

Soils (EA section 3.4): Effects to this resource would not have significant impacts because:

- Fragile soil sites including very steep areas have been excluded from the action area.
- Project design features and Best Management Practices, including limiting compaction to 10% of the project area or less (which is within RMP standards [C-2 - C-9] which were analyzed in the RMP/FEIS), have been incorporated to specifically reduce soil compaction and displacement which in turn should reduce soil productivity loss associated with the project.
- The project results in a thinning which will retain most of the vegetation, root systems, and vegetative litter after harvest which is expected to respond vigorously to the increased light after harvest.
- Soils in the project area are very deep and resilient and are less susceptible to productivity losses resulting from timber harvest than are shallower soils.

- Project design features require the use of previously disturbed areas to the extent practicable which will reduce the area disturbed by harvesting equipment.
- At least 25% and most likely at least 50% of the limbs and tops of the harvested trees will remain on site to contribute to soil stability and nutrient cycling.

Threatened or Endangered Wildlife Species, Habitat and/or Critical Habitat: (EA section 3.5) Effects to this resource would not have significant impacts because:

- The project will not affect the marbled murrelet because the only known potential nesting structures have been excluded from the project.
- The project will not affect spotted owls in the near term because surveys have shown that owls are not using the area and habitat conditions are such that they are not likely to be.
- Habitat for the northern spotted owl is currently dispersal habitat and will continue to function as dispersal habitat after harvest.
- In the long term, the project is expected to be higher quality suitable habitat sooner than if the project is not implemented.
- The project will also benefit late-successional forest processes that are not currently occurring.
- The project is expected to have a minor adverse effect in the short term (0-15 years) to spotted owl critical habitat by slightly reducing the already poor habitat for flying squirrels, the spotted owls primary prey item. Marbled murrelet critical habitat will not be affected in the short term. In the long term the project is expected to benefit critical habitat after 30-50 years which is many decades sooner than is expected if the project is not implemented.

Special Status (BLM 6840 Policy), SEIS Special Attention (Salem RMP), and Migratory Bird Treaty Act Wildlife Species and Habitat: (EA section 3.6) Effects to this resource would not have significant impacts because:

- All acres of the project area that required surveys have been surveyed. Known sites for red tree voles have been excluded from any project areas and are protected by 10 acre management areas. SEIS Special Attention (Survey and Manage) lichen species located during surveys will be managed by protection of the trees where they are found.
- Habitat quality for red tree voles is expected to decrease for the next 15 years and then improve faster than if no action were taken as the treated stands become more structurally complex.
- No survey and manage mollusk species were found during surveys and there is not expected to be any loss of persistence at any undetected mollusk sites.
- There is little probability that the proposed action will adversely affect any migratory birds, bald eagle, or other Bureau Sensitive species.
- The project is not expected to adversely affect any bat species of concern identified in the Salem District RMP.
- The proposed action includes density management thinning which is known to increase species richness of migratory birds.

Recreation and Visual Resources (EA section 3.7): Effects to this resource would not have significant impacts because:

- The project will not change the types of recreation opportunities available and would only have minor effects for a few years (3-8). Recreation opportunity is expected to return to pre-project conditions within 8 years.
- Project design features have been incorporated to reduce potential conflicts with the motoring public using the Nestucca Backcountry Byway.
- Analysis for Visual Resource Management Classes I –IV was conducted and the project was found to adhere to visual resource management objectives for all classes.

Invasive, Non-native Species (Executive Order 13112): (EA section 3.8): Effects to this resource would not have significant impacts because:

- The currently existing assemblage of invasive, non-native species are generally not tolerant of shade and should they emerge on disturbed sites within the project area it is expected that they would not persist as the canopy becomes closed again.

- Project design feature that include equipment washing and monitoring is expected to keep new infestations of shade tolerant species from becoming established.

Special Status and SEIS Special Attention Plant Species and Habitat: (EA section 3.9): Effects to this resource would not have significant impacts because:

- All sites for Special Status and SEIS Special Attention plants that were located during surveys favor larger conifers and will be protected by reserving the trees they were found on and also by project design features that reserve the largest trees in the treatment units (diameter cut limits).

Air Quality, Fire Risk and Fuels Management: (EA section 3.10): Effects to this resource would not have significant impacts because:

- Any dust and smoke resulting from the proposed action will be localized and not affect populated areas or contribute negatively to human health and safety.
- Any burning that is done would be done in strict compliance with State of Oregon Smoke Management regulations.
- Project design features will reduce the potential for fire ignition by managing fuels most susceptible to ignition near roads and trails. Small easily ignitable fuels will decay within a short time after harvest with a corresponding reduction in fire risk.

Carbon Storage, Carbon Emissions, and Climate Change (EA section 3.11): Effects to this resource would not have significant impacts because:

- The incremental increase in carbon emissions as greenhouse gases that could be attributable to the proposed action is of such small magnitude that it is unlikely to be detectable at global, continental or regional scales or to affect the results of any models now being used to predict climate change.

2. The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety. Public health and safety was not identified as an issue. The proposed projects are comparable to other restoration projects that include density management which have occurred within the Salem District with no unusual health or safety concerns.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. No historic or cultural resource sites have been identified within the project areas. There are no park lands, prime farm lands, or wilderness areas located within the project area. There are no federally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers within the project areas although the Nestucca River, which the Nestucca Access Road is adjacent to and is a potential haul route for the proposed action has been determined to be eligible for inclusion as a recreational river under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The Nestucca River is also located within the Nestucca River Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The Nestucca Access Road has been in existence since before the designation of the Nestucca River ACEC and vehicle travel has not, nor is it expected to affect the relevant and important features for which the ACECs was designated. There are no known wetlands within the proposed project area; however, if any are discovered during project implementation, there are project design features incorporated into the project to protect them. Activities associated with the proposed coarse wood development outside of the density management units are designed to accelerate the development of some late-successional forest structural features and are not predicted to impact wetlands or riparian areas.

There are no other known ecologically critical areas within or adjacent to the project areas.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial. Scoping of the proposed projects resulted in one comment letter indicating that the level of concern is no greater than most other projects the BLM proposes. The disposition of scoping comments is contained in section 7 of the EA. The EA and an unsigned copy of the FONSI were also made available to the public for comment of which two comment letters were received. None of the comments exposed new controversy related to management of public forests.

The effects of the proposed projects on the quality of the human environment were adequately understood by the interdisciplinary team to provide an environmental analysis. A complete disclosure of the predicted effects of the proposed projects is contained within Section 3 of the EA.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. The proposed projects are not unique or unusual. The BLM has experience implementing similar projects in similar areas and have found effects to be reasonably predictable. The environmental effects to the human environment are fully analyzed in the EA. There are no predicted effects on the human environment which are considered to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration. The proposed projects do not set a precedent for future actions that may have significant effects, nor do they represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. Any future projects will be evaluated through the NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) process and will stand on their own as to environmental effects.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. The interdisciplinary team evaluated the proposed projects in the context of past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions (Section 3). A complete disclosure of the effects of the action alternatives is contained in Section 3 of the EA. Cumulative effects have been identified for Forest Vegetation Resources (EA Sections 3.1.4), Water Resources (EA Section 3.2.4) Fisheries Resources (EA Section 3.3.4) Soils Resources (EA Section 3.4.4) Wildlife Resources (EA Sections 3.5.4, 3.5.5, and 3.6.4), Recreation and Visual Resources (EA Section 3.7.4) Plants (EA Sections 3.8.4, and 3.9.4), Air Quality, Fire Risk, and Fuels (EA Section 3.10.4), and Carbon Storage (EA Section 3.11.4). None of the identified cumulative effects were determined to be significant.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. The proposed project was assessed, including field reconnaissance, for its potential to contain important cultural resources and none were found (Project Record Document # 49). Therefore, the proposed projects will not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor will the proposed projects cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. Project Design Features have been incorporated that would protect any cultural resource should they be discovered during project implementation (EA Section 2.1.3.2).

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its designated critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Wildlife: The proposed project is expected to have a short-term negative impact on spotted owl dispersal habitat but have a long-term positive effect on spotted owl suitable habitat, which requires informal consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. There would not be any effects to marbled murrelets or their habitat. In accordance with regulations pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, informal consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) concerning the potential impacts of the Walker Creek Terrestrial Restoration Project upon the spotted owls and/or their designated Critical Habitat has been completed by including the planned implementation projects (the Day Walker and Night Walker timber sales to be implemented consistent with the analysis in the Walker Creek Terrestrial Restoration Project EA) within the *Biological Assessment (BA) Of Habitat Modification Projects Proposed During Fiscal Years 2015 And 2016 In The North Coast Planning Province, Oregon, That Are Not Likely To Adversely Affect (Nlaa) Northern Spotted Owls Or Marbled Murrelets And Their Critical Habitats* (August 7, 2014). A Letter of Concurrence (LOC) for the BA has been received from the USFWS (FWS Reference Number 01EOFW00-2014-I-0234) indicating their

agreement that the Walker Creek Project (including the timber sale projects) would not adversely affect spotted owls or their habitat as long as all of the Terms and Conditions from the LOC are incorporated into all projects stemming from the Walker Creek Terrestrial Restoration EA. Any pertinent Terms and Conditions will be incorporated into the individual projects.

Fisheries: The BLM determined that based on the potential for small inputs of sediment to Oregon Coast coho salmon habitat streams from timber haul and culvert replacement, and that there is a possibility of a slight reduction of wood recruitment potential to a coho habitat stream, that informal consultation with National Marine Fisheries Service is warranted (Section 4.2.2 of the EA). Consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service on these potential effects of the proposed project on coho was conducted with a project specific consultation (Section 7 Streamlined Consultation) in the summer of 2014. A Letter of Concurrence indicating that the project would not result in adverse effects to Oregon Coast coho was received from the National Marine Fisheries Service on September 23, 2014 thus concluding consultation requirements (NMFS reference Number WCR-2014-588). Required assessment for Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act Essential Fish Habitat for the proposed action is included in EA (Section 3.3.3 of the EA).

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. The proposed projects do not violate any known Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. The EA and supporting Project Record contain discussions pertaining to the Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, Oregon Scenic Waterways Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Executive Order 13112 (Invasive Species). State, local, and tribal interests were given the opportunity to participate in the environmental analysis process. Furthermore, the proposed projects are consistent with applicable land management plans, policies, and programs.

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12/16/14

Date

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